

**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
In Support of Funding for After School Programs**

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Submitted by Rachel Zwick

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Where would we be without our ten year old lions? My name is Rachel Zwick, and I am sixteen years old. I am a junior theatre student at Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School in New Haven. I have participated Coop After School, or, as it is known to the Coop community, CAS, since my freshman year. After school is an integral part of the Coop experience. It supports creative expression, personal growth, and exploration of self through countless opportunities. My classmates express that their willingness to attend school is heightened on days their CAS programs meet. After school gives them something to look forward to and work towards, it is an extra two hours of the school day that keeps them motivated and excited to learn.

One of my favorite parts about Coop After School is the relationships forged over the course of the programs. I have been in several musicals and plays since freshman year, but have also spent time in the Tech Theatre Club and watercolor paint class. The friendships I have made are irreplaceable. After school programming allows for students of different years, majors and backgrounds to form lasting friendships and heighten our school-wide sense of community. I had the pleasure to meet Solomon Green, a Coop alumni, last year during auditions for the musical. I was a sophomore theatre student and he was a senior creative writer, and our paths would not have crossed if not for Broken Chains, an original musical written by a Yale University graduate student, that was produced for the first time on our stage. I cannot even begin to describe how rewarding it was to create such a moving piece of musical theatre, but the people we shared it with made it so memorable and worthwhile. During the rehearsal process, the cast grew to be a family, and I came to know Solomon as a friend. I could never have imagined meeting someone so creative, talented, and motivated, someone so destined for greatness as he is, and without CAS, he would have graduated and I would have been none the wiser. That is what after school is all about. It joins together young people through common interests, and sometimes interests we didn't even know we had. We need that. As young adults trying to find our place in the world, and within ourselves, after school is priceless.

I have been so inspired by the experiences I've had with Coop After School, that I have decided to give back to my community. Since October 2012, I've spent my Monday afternoons in my home district, and have taught theatre classes to twenty-two of the brightest, most creative fourth and fifth graders I have ever had the honor to meet. The change we've witnessed together is remarkable. They entered my class as meek, reserved babies, and it warms my heart to see them running and jumping around, comfortable in their environment and with themselves.

Where would we be without our ten year old lions? One little boy walked into my classroom, shy as can be, a cub in the grand scheme of things. By the time he left my class, that little cub transformed into a King of the Jungle: confident, brave, passionate and mighty. I had him roaring and posing around, all the while with this big smile on his face that you wouldn't have seen eight weeks earlier.

I'm just one sixteen year old girl, attending a magnet school in New Haven, learning, growing, and striving for a bright future, working together within my community to form a safe, creative jungle we can all be Kings in. These budget cuts aren't going to just affect me or my friends. Without Coop After School, that little boy would still be stuck sitting alone at the lunch table. Who knows what he will in turn contribute to society now that he has the courage, the confidence, because I given the chance to grow and learn with a few amazing teachers, many bright, creative people, and one invaluable after school opportunity.